

# **2008 MICHIGAN DEER HUNTING PROSPECTS**

## **THE STATEWIDE FORECAST**

**Contact Person: Rodney Clute: 517 373-1263**

There are some changes to deer hunting regulations that will impact deer hunters this year. Chronic wasting disease (CWD), an always fatal neurological disease of deer and elk, was confirmed in a privately-owned cervid (deer) facility in Kent County in August. The CWD Emergency Response Plan, adopted by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in 2002, requires a ban on all feeding and baiting of cervids within the peninsula where CWD is documented. This baiting ban will help to prevent the potential spread of CWD. The DNR is also increasing surveillance for CWD in the wild deer herd. Michigan's CWD response plan calls for additional surveillance of wild deer in Kent and adjacent counties. A nine-township CWD Surveillance Zone (CSZ) in Kent County has been delineated and includes the townships of Tyrone, Solon, Nelson, Sparta, Algoma, Courtland, Alpine, Plainfield, and Cannon. All deer from the CSZ must be tested for CWD. Heads from these deer must be taken to one of the deer check stations inside the CSZ so samples can be submitted for testing. Locations of these check stations and additional information about CWD surveillance efforts may be found on the DNR Web site at [www.michigan.gov/dnr](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr). Deer harvested in the CSZ of Kent County cannot be removed from the zone without a negative CWD test; otherwise only boned-out meat, antlers with skull caps cleaned of all soft tissue, and hides may be removed. Hunters harvesting deer outside of the CSZ and taking their deer to a DNR deer check station may also be asked to donate the deer head for CWD testing.

Another change only impacts deer hunting in the Upper Peninsula (UP) is a "hunters choice buck tag" regulation. This regulation was passed by the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) with support from the UP Whitetails Association of Marquette County. Hunters must decide, before purchasing their deer license, if they wish the opportunity to take one or two legally antlered deer. Those wishing the opportunity to shoot two bucks must purchase a combination license. Both bucks have antler point restrictions. One buck must have one antler with at least three antler points; the other buck must have one antler with at least four antler points. A legal point is at least one inch long and longer than it is wide. Those choosing to purchase a firearm deer license or an archery deer license, or both, are limited to taking one legally antlered buck, with no antler point restrictions, all seasons combined. See the *2008 Hunting and Trapping Guide* for additional information on this regulation, which only pertains to hunting in the UP. Those deer hunting in the Lower Peninsula (LP) have the same regulations as in 2007. This guide may also be found on the DNR Web site.

## **Western Upper Peninsula (WUP) Management Unit**

**Robert Doecker 906-228-6561**

The 2007-2008 winter in the (WUP) Management Unit was one of the most severe in the past 15 years, ranking behind only the extremely difficult winters of 1995-96 and 1996-97. The severity of winter weather is a major factor determining the number, physical development, and productivity of deer in the WUP. In the majority of the WUP, snow began to accumulate in late November 2007, and persisted until early April 2008. Snow depths of one foot or more were common for more than three months, restricting deer movement and limiting food supplies.

Weakened and dead deer were found in moderate numbers during late winter and spring surveys. Overall, the impacts of the 2007-08 winter will be reflected in reduced numbers of 1½ year old deer in the harvest this year. The reduced number of fawns observed this summer suggests a residual impact on next year's deer season. We expect a reduction of approximately 10 percent in the buck harvest in the WUP.

Deer numbers in the WUP will be lower than in the recent past, but very near the 50-year average level. Deer will again be most plentiful on the agricultural landscapes of southern Menominee, western Delta, south Marquette, and west Alger Counties. Much of this land is privately owned and owner permission is required to hunt on it. Private land antlerless deer licenses are still available in the agricultural deer management units. They can be purchased at a rate of one per day, two per year, until the quota is reached. These antlerless licenses are valid during all seasons with appropriate equipment to match the season.

Extensively forested areas usually have lower deer densities when compared to agricultural areas. Within the primarily forested areas, deer numbers are highest in east Iron, southern Dickinson and Marquette, north Menominee, and west Delta Counties. Quotas for public land antlerless deer licenses are usually lower than for private land and they tend to sell out more quickly. Generally, deer numbers are lower on primarily forested state, federal, and commercial forest act lands, however, hunter density will also be lower, which some hunters desire.

Hunters will likely observe a below-average number of fawns and 1½ year-old bucks this fall due to winter impacts. The largest bucks, weight and antlers size, typically come from agricultural areas, but some older bucks are also taken from forested country where access is limited and they have an opportunity to grow older. Antler development should be average, or slightly below, due to the stress deer experienced this past winter plus two back-to-back summers with well below-average precipitation and its impact on the abundance and nutrition quality of summer vegetation.

Fruit and acorn production is good to excellent across the WUP. The presence of an abundant acorn crop will attract deer to those areas that contain oaks. Advance scouting to locate areas where oak is present will pay dividends to the hunter.

**Unit Biologists:**

**Baraga, Gogebic, Houghton, Keweenaw, and Ontonagon Counties**

**Rob Aho                      906-353-6651**

**Iron and Dickinson Counties**

**Doug Wagner              906-875-6622**

**Delta and Menominee Counties**

**Craig Albright              906-786-2351**

**Marquette and west Alger Counties**

**Terry McFadden            906-228-6561**

## **Eastern Upper Peninsula (EUP) Management Unit**

**Terry Minzey: 906-293-5131**

Portions of the EUP experienced fairly severe snow conditions during the winter of 2007-08. Snow depths in the southern portion of the unit were sufficient to result in a reduction of the yearling age class for the 2008 deer season. Additionally, the number of fawns observed in 2008 will be reduced from 2007 levels as a result of the harsh winter conditions.

It is anticipated that the EUP will experience a fall deer population below that of 2007. Distribution of deer will not be uniform with agricultural areas having higher deer densities, and public land and heavily forested areas containing fewer deer than the average for these areas. Likewise, the southern portion of the EUP will have higher deer numbers, with the deer densities decreasing farther north.

Based upon the 2007 Deer Camp Survey, it appears there was a strong cohort of yearling bucks that survived last year's firearm season and likely graduated into the 2½ year age class. As such, although available yearling bucks will be reduced from 2007 levels due to poor survival during the harsh winter, 2½ year-old bucks should be present in relatively good numbers.

The availability of antlerless licenses has been decreased in most areas of the EUP, and has been eliminated in Deer Management Unit (DMU) 021. However, some agricultural areas continue to experience crop damage issues and hunters are encouraged to scout private agricultural lands and check with farmers who may desire fewer deer on their lands.

Fruit and nut production has been fairly good across the EUP. Due to beech bark disease, many private landowners, including the commercial forest lands, have been actively removing beech from their forest. The reduction in hard mast from this activity may well impact deer movements and activity on a local basis.

### **Unit Biologists:**

#### **East Alger, Schoolcraft Counties, and Garden Peninsula:**

**Terry Minzey                      906-452-6236**

#### **Luce and West Mackinac Counties:**

**Kristie Sitar                      906-293-5024**

#### **Chippewa and East Mackinac Counties:**

**Erynn Call                      906-635-6161**

## **Northwestern Management Unit (NWMU)**

**Larry Visser: 231-775-9727**

Deer hunters in the NWMU should expect to see the same or slightly more deer than they saw in 2007. Antlerless deer license quotas have been reduced for the past several years in many of the DMUs, and deer populations have been increasing. Despite a more severe winter this past winter, deer came through in good condition. A few fawns were lost, especially on private land with poor quality wintering habitat.

Deer numbers in the northern counties, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, and Leelanau, are approaching goal; however, antlerless deer licenses are only available in Leelanau County. This county is a quality deer management area. Reduced harvest of younger bucks in Leelanau County for the past several years is resulting in an increased proportion of older bucks.

In the central counties, Manistee, Osceola, Lake, Mason, Missaukee, and Wexford, deer populations appear to be at or slightly above goal. Deer numbers are higher on private land than on public land. Some of the best hunting in these counties is typically found where agricultural land and forest land are interspersed.

Two of the southern counties, Oceana and Newaygo, are similar to the central counties with deer populations somewhat above goal. Deer populations in these two counties should be similar to 2007. The other southern county, Mecosta, continues to remain significantly above goal. This county has a good mixture of croplands, wetlands and woodlands, which provide good deer habitat and excellent deer hunting.

The soft mast crop was somewhat impacted by late spring frost and the drought this summer. Both the white oak and the red/black oak acorn production are spotty across all these counties. Beech trees in some areas have produced well. Also, there is a good apple crop. Antler development appears to be about average this year.

**Unit Biologists:**

**Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Leelanau, and Manistee Counties:**

Rich Earle 231-922-5280

**Lake, Mason, Missaukee, Osceola, and Wexford Counties**

Larry Smith 231-745-4651

**Oceana, Newaygo, and Mecosta Counties**

Pete Kailing 231-745-4651

**Northeastern Management Unit (NEMU)**

**Tim Reis: 989-732-3541**

The NEMU will enter the fall deer season with increased numbers of deer over much of the unit as compared to last season. Despite a somewhat harsh winter in 2008, good fawn production has been observed. A modest antlerless deer harvest in 2007 has also contributed to deer numbers that are up noticeably. The buck kill may not exceed the excellent harvest that occurred in 2006, but should be quite good. Antler growth in yearling bucks will not equal the exceptional level observed in 2006, but good numbers of two-year-old and older bucks are present in the population. Hunters are encouraged to take advantage of the increased antlerless deer hunting opportunities in the bovine tuberculosis (TB) area to facilitate population management where it is most critical in the NEMU.

The best deer hunting success has typically occurred in the mixed agricultural and forest land areas of Ogemaw, Iosco, and western Antrim and Charlevoix counties. Private forest lands in Alpena, Alcona, and Montmorency counties have good numbers of deer, and success rates have generally been good for bucks, as well as antlerless deer. Public lands in Alcona, Crawford, Montmorency, Oscoda, and Roscommon counties have also provided good deer hunting opportunities in recent years.

Acorns and beechnuts are spotty across much the management unit; however there are bumper crops in some areas which may influence local deer distributions this hunting season. Apples are very spotty. Recent rains have begun to rejuvenate ground vegetation; and deer will be feeding heavily in fields, openings, and low ground until snow cover.

Ongoing TB management efforts require a large sample of deer heads from northeast Michigan to continue to assess the distribution and rate of infection. An even greater effort to collect samples will occur this season due to increased surveillance for CWD.

The same baiting and feeding ban that has been imposed on the TB management area since 1998, now applies to all deer hunters in the LP. Hunters are encouraged to spend extra time scouting to learn the behavioral patterns of local deer. Natural food sources will be very important places for hunters to improve their chances for seeing deer.

Very few elk are accidentally shot by deer hunters, however, those deer hunting in elk range in Montmorency, Otsego, Cheboygan, and southwest Presque Isle counties are reminded to be careful and avoid the unintended shooting of an elk.

**Unit Biologists:**

**Alcona, Crawford, and Oscoda Counties:**

Elaine Carlson 989-826-3211 Ext. 7030

**Alpena, Montmorency, and Presque Isle Counties:**

Jennifer Kleitch 989-785-4251 Ext. 5230

**Antrim, Charlevoix, Cheboygan, Emmet, and Otsego Counties:**

Brian Mastenbrook 989-732-3541 Ext. 5430

**Iosco, Ogemaw, and Roscommon Counties:**

Mark Boersen 989-275-5151 Ext. 2730

**Saginaw Bay Management Unit (SBMU)**

**Rex Ainslie: 989-684-9141**

Hunters should expect a similar harvest in the SBMU, as experienced during the 2007 season.

Deer populations remain at or above goal in Clare, Gladwin, Arenac, Isabella, Midland, Saginaw and Bay counties; and greatly exceed desired population levels in Huron, Sanilac and Tuscola counties. The highest deer densities will be observed in the northernmost tier of counties. The distribution of deer is noticeably different on public and private lands with greater numbers of deer on private land.

Fawn recruitment appears to be average across the management unit. It also appears that we may have experienced a greater number of late born fawns this summer, possibly due to the abundance of one-year-old does reproducing for the first time. Fawn survival appears to be above normal, which could mean slightly more deer in 2008. Field observations and hunter reports indicate that a slightly higher percentage of bucks may be present this year compared to last.

A particularly wet summer impacted forage plants and mast (fruits and nuts) crops, across the management unit. Soft mast is abundant in most areas, while acorn production is variable across the SBMU. Where oaks have produced decent acorn crops, the fruit appear well

developed and should provide ample food resources. However, on the drier sandy soils, acorn production was observed to be generally poor and will not likely be attractive to deer.

The timeliness of the harvest of agricultural crops impacts the deer harvest in the SBMU. Hunter success is best during years when most of the corn is harvested before the opening day of the firearm season. Favorable summer weather should benefit deer hunters with the early harvest of many agricultural crops in some portions of the SBMU. Deer will concentrate in brushy and forested cover types as a result. However, the Thumb area received above normal rainfall and the corn harvest should follow a more normal pattern with some corn still standing into the firearm season.

Antlerless deer license quotas remain similar to last year. There were a limited amount public land antlerless licenses available for Clare, Gladwin, and Arenac counties which is a change from last year. The entire Thumb area -- Sanilac, Huron and Tuscola counties -- now has early and late antlerless deer seasons.

Deer hunters are urged to visit a check station to assist with disease surveillance and data collection vital to the successful management of local deer herds. Hunters wishing to check deer at Bay City are reminded that the office has moved next to the Bay City State Recreation Area at 3580 State Park Dr., Bay City, Michigan 48706

Deer hunting opportunities exist on the many wetlands and managed waterfowl areas in the SBMU; however, they may be limited during the waterfowl hunting season. Deer hunting is by permit only on the following managed waterfowl areas: Nayanquing Point, Fish Point, and the Shiawassee River State Game Area (SGA), as well as the Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge. Hunters are encouraged to call ahead for specific details concerning deer hunting on these and other wetland areas.

**Unit Biologists:**

**Clare, Gladwin, and Arenac counties:**

**Richard Shellenbarger 989-426-9205, Ext 7630**

**Isabella, Midland, Bay, and Saginaw counties:**

**Vacant (call OSC) 989-684-9141**

**Wetlands/Waterfowl Areas:**

**Vacant (call OSC) or St. Charles**

**989-865-6211**

**Huron, Tuscola, and Sanilac counties:**

**Arnie Karr 989-872-5300**

**Southeast Management Unit**

**Tim Payne: 248-359-9040**

The 2008 deer hunting season should be good in the SEMU. Weather will dictate how successful hunters will be, especially in the opening days of the season. But deer numbers are there.

Deer numbers appear to be similar throughout most of the area and up slightly in the St. Clair and northern Macomb County areas as compared to 2007 population numbers. There are more

crop-related complaints this year, which is likely due to the higher costs associated with farming (fuel and fertilizer).

Overall, agricultural crops appear to be in excellent shape and an average date of harvest is expected. Wild fruit and nut production appears to be very good throughout the unit.

Some of the best hunting for the SEMU will be in Lapeer and northern St. Clair counties. Each of these areas have State Game Areas (SGAs) -- Lapeer SGA and Port Huron SGA -- but are still mostly private lands. Other localized good areas will be northeastern Oakland County, western Monroe and southwestern Wayne counties.

Many hunters have indicated that the high fuel costs will modify their hunting this year. There won't be as many trips north, with more local hunting and some hunters seeking to lease nearby lands.

Much of the SEMU is close to the population goal. Populations in Lapeer, Genesee and Oakland counties are still well over the desired goals. These areas have significant private lands with excellent deer habitat and many landowners are still reluctant to allow antlerless hunting. Landowners are reminded that carrying high populations of deer on their lands may result in damaged habitat, social conflicts and reduced growth potential for the individual deer.

Recently, Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD) was discovered as the cause of many deer dying in parts of Oakland and Macomb Counties, primarily along the Clinton River. While the extent of the disease is still unknown, most of the areas where the deaths have been documented are areas with hunting restrictions. For the most part, this will have little impact on hunting in those areas.

**Unit Biologists:**

**Genesee, Lapeer, Oakland**

**Julie Oakes                      248-328-8113**

**Macomb, St. Clair,**

**Ernie Kafcas                      810-465-4771**

**Monroe, Wayne**

**Joe Robison                      734-379-9692**

**South Central Management Unit (SCMU)**

**David Dominic: 517-641-4903**

The SCMU deer population continues to persist well above desired levels. While a lack of rainfall was a minor issue in mid-summer of 2008, adequate precipitation occurred in the spring, early summer, and again in late summer/early fall that appears to have produced an abundance of natural food (wild apples, acorns and preferred browse) and agricultural food in southern Michigan. Agricultural crops were used heavily as the numbers of both crop-damage complaints and out-of-season shooting permits were once again very high throughout the management unit. The expected buck and antlerless harvest should be similar to or greater than the 2007 season throughout the SCMU. The counties with the highest deer populations are Montcalm, Ionia, Jackson, and Clinton. An adequate quota for private land antlerless deer licenses has been established in all SCMU counties in an effort to lower the deer populations in problem areas. The goal is to lower the deer population throughout the SCMU and private-land access

is the key to being successful. Hunters need to start scouting early and acquiring access to private lands early. The early antlerless season in September was implemented for the first time in southern Michigan, including the SCMU, and was popular with some hunters.

Hunters are encouraged to use antlerless licenses to harvest deer in all seasons, including the late-firearm antlerless season on private land, Dec. 22 through Jan. 1. During this season, only antlerless deer on private lands may be taken with a firearm. Permission is required from the landowner and/or leaseholder; obtaining permission early will be to hunters' advantage. Remember: archery season is also open during the late-firearm antlerless season.

Hunters are encouraged to have their deer checked at one of the many deer check stations throughout the state. A Michigan Deer Cooperator patch will be given to hunters who have their deer checked. Antlerless deer are of special interest and encouraged to be brought to the check stations.

Deer Season Prospects for Eaton, Ionia, and Montcalm counties are as follows; the projected deer populations are well above goal for all three DMUs. It appears that the Eaton County population is stabilizing and the harvest of both antlered and antlerless deer should be similar to last year. The Ionia County population is well above goal, but it appears that this is stabilizing and the harvest should be similar to 2007 for both antlered and antlerless deer. Montcalm County continues to have a high deer population but it appears that the increases have stabilized and that the harvest on antlered and antlerless deer should be similar to last year.

Deer Season Prospects for Clinton, Gratiot, Ingham, Livingston, and Shiawassee counties are as follows; corn harvest appears to be similar to 2007, a significant portion of the corn could be harvested by Nov. 15 and an early corn harvest will concentrate deer in a much more vulnerable forested and brushy vegetation type. Deer harvest should be similar to last year in these counties or increase due to a slightly larger population size and lack of escape cover provided by standing corn. However, local crop harvest, hunter pressure and weather may influence hunting conditions and overall harvest rates.

Deer Season Prospects for Hillsdale, Jackson, Lenawee, and Washtenaw counties are as follows; deer numbers are still above the goal for these areas and complaints of crop damage caused by deer have increased in 2008 from previous years. Although complaints of deer damage have increased, the population itself does not appear to be significantly increasing, with numbers remaining at approximately the same levels as recent years. The trend for deer-vehicle accidents in the area coincides with this population trend.

Harvest in 2008 for these counties is expected to be similar to the 2007 harvest. Hunters are encouraged to take more antlerless deer in these counties; the late firearm season will give hunters the opportunity to harvest additional antlerless deer. Hunters are also encouraged to inquire about hunting privately owned cropland, where damage has been reaching intolerable levels. In an effort to assist farmers in alleviating crop damage, it is recommended that hunters asking for permission to hunt private property offer to take at least one antlerless deer before taking a buck.



**Unit Biologists:**

**Eaton, Ionia, and Montcalm Counties:**

John Niewoonder 616-794-2658

**Clinton, Gratiot, Ingham, Livingston, and Shiawassee Counties:**

Earl Flegler 517-373-9358

**Jackson, Hillsdale, Lenawee, and Washtenaw Counties:**

Kristin Bissell 517-522-4097

**Southwestern Management Unit (SWMU)**

**Sara Schaefer: 269-685-6851**

Deer populations remain generally stable in the unit, but most counties have deer populations above established goals. Deer numbers continue to be very high in Barry, Calhoun, and Kent counties, especially on private lands. Deer are becoming increasingly numerous in suburban and residential habitat areas throughout southwestern Michigan. Legal deer hunting is an important aspect of deer management in these areas.

Crop harvest started in September and is on schedule this year in most of the SWMU. Acorn and soft mast production appears to be below average heading into the fall season due in part to dry conditions during the summer. As a result, deer may be found in pockets associated with food sources. Deer should continue to be in excellent physical condition.

Antlerless deer licenses are allocated by quotas in all the southwest DMUs, and all units have private land antlerless deer licenses. However, hunters may purchase no more than five private-land antlerless licenses, there is no minimum acreage requirement to purchase one of these licenses. Hunters are reminded that Allegan, Barry, Branch, Calhoun, Cass, Kalamazoo, Kent, Ottawa, St. Joseph, and Van Buren counties are all open for the late firearm antlerless season, and are urged to take advantage of private land hunting opportunities in these counties.

There was an average harvest in 2007 throughout most of this unit. In areas where deer populations remain above goal, the harvest of adult antlerless deer is an important part of responsible deer population management. Average fawn production in 2007 should result in consistent numbers of yearling bucks in most units.

CWD was discovered in Kent County at a privately-owned cervid facility in 2008. The implementation of Michigan's CWD response plan calls for additional surveillance of wild deer in Kent County and adjacent counties. The nine-township CSZ in Kent County has been delineated and includes the townships of Tyrone, Solon, Nelson, Sparta, Algoma, Courtland, Alpine, Plainfield, and Cannon. All deer from the CSZ must be tested for CWD. Heads from these deer must be taken to one of the deer check stations inside the CSZ so samples can be submitted for testing. Locations of these check stations and additional information about CWD surveillance efforts can be found on the DNR Web site at [www.michigan.gov/dnr](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr). Deer harvested in the CSZ of Kent County cannot be removed from the zone without a negative CWD test; otherwise only boned-out meat, antlers with skull caps cleansed of all soft tissue, and hides may be removed.

Due to the finding of CWD in southwest Michigan, there is added concern about overpopulation, making it even more important that landowners and hunters work together to reduce deer

populations in southwest Michigan. Hunters can contribute excess deer to Michigan Sportsmen Against Hunger to process wild game for local families in need.

Access to private land is an important part of successful deer hunting and management in southwestern Michigan. Individual hunters can play important roles in maintaining hunting access. Please remember that courtesy, safety and early pre-season contact with landowners are all vital parts of securing access to private hunting lands.

**Unit Biologists:**

**Berrien, Cass, St. Joseph, Kalamazoo (south), and Van Buren Counties:**

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**Allegan County:**

John Lerg, 269-685-6851

**Barry, Branch, Calhoun, and Kalamazoo (north) Counties:**

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**Kent, Muskegon, and Ottawa Counties:**

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